THE FREE LANCE

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APPLES AND DUST

Out toward Akron, around the hills of Boston, the Ohio countryside is parched this year. The sixty-foot cascade that falls off the road to Brandywine has shrunk to a slender trickle, and the grass everywhere is dry and brittle. Up the road by his deserted farm cottage, stands the small one-room schoolhouse that served William Sommer as a studio for over thirty years. The purple phlox that his wife once planted runs thin and stunted under the trees, and her rosebushes lean lankly over the drive. Strangers are living in the handsome place over the rise that young Ed Sommer built for his bride many years ago.

Inside the boarded-up studio are scattered some remains of the old painter's possessions, gathering dust as legal complications grind on. In the closet: great stacks of The Dial, The Freeman, Bruno's Bohemia, and some Little Reviews. In the bookcase, remnants of his library: the Aphorisms of Stendhal (in German), Hofmannsthal's Frau ohne Schatten, Milton's Prose, Der Doppelgänger by Dostoievski, the Levy edition of Nietzsche's works, and Stirner's The Ego and His Own. Critiques of Cubism, Expressionism, Rilke's Rodin; beautiful monographs on Carpaccio, Van Gogh, Japanese wood-carvings and on Hokusai—the old man who was mad about painting.

Dust covers the paintings that remain, stacked loosely against the walls. An iota of the works Sommer created in his long lifetime; most of it dating from his fiftieth year when his sons had grown up. An early portrait of his wife, reminiscent of Sloan, showing a shy reposeful beauty. A small study of a scotty dog sleeping in a window with gay canine nonchalance. A great poster-like painting of Indians dancing around a camp-fire. And one or two watercolors of the little boys he delighted to record, weltering in their ugliest expressions, accentuated with unrestrained splashes of greens, blues and purples. And the clean lines of country horses. Most of the beautiful scenes of pasture-land dispersed by now; given to friends, bought up by museums, or spirited away during the sprees of his last years.

On the trees outside, uncared for and gnarled, Bill's apples are still ripening. Not the mealy-sweet bitter-skinned brand of 'Delicious' apples that pile up on city newstands, but crisp, sweet, green-tinged apples to the taste of an Ohio farmer. The

kind of fruit that Vachel Lindsay's sturdy mystic, Johnny Appleseed, sowed across the Ohio countryside.

These trees were blossoming in the April of 1921 when Hart Crane first visited the Sommer studio. Although the painter's young sketching companions, Abel and Alex Warshawsky and William Zorach, had gone on to Paris to study, the place was never empty. And as a new group of young people began to gather there over weeks of Sundays, the fruitfulness and vitality of their exchanges may properly be called, in retrospect, the ' Cleveland Renaissance.'

The gathering was generally dominated by the bulky figure of an Akron farm boy named Fetzer who signed his novels and his column in the Beacon Journal as Jake Falstaff. Next to him sat his wife, Hazel Stevenson, also a writer. Along with them, another newspaperman and an art enthusiast, Bob Bordner. Then Sommer's fellow-worker, the quiet blond Norwegian non-conformist, Ernest Nelson (in whose memory Crane later wrote the beautiful elegy, ' Praise for an Urn.') And Sam Loveman, a reserved young poet, dreaming of Edgar Saltus' Greece and Rome. Perhaps occasionally, Hazel Collister Hutchison, another poet, of a sensitive and delicate artistry, who brought news of the then-new Cleveland Playhouse. To complete the circle, the Swiss architect, Willy Lescaze ; a young Russian librarian, Peter Keisogloff ; and the skeptical, enthusiastic Charles of the correspondence.

Charles and the ebullient Willy Lescaze and Hart Crane would climb aboard the Akron trolley of a Sunday, hoisting along a jug of bootleg Italian or Jewish wine, and feeling as devilish as all-get-out. After the two or three-mile hike to Sommer's place, the latest paintings would be put on display as arguments grew hot and heavy. Talk in Ohio was inquiring, buoyant and robust. In contrast to the regal notions that channeled the soirees in Florence at Berenson's I Tatti, or Gertrude Stein's Paris salon. And without the need to defer to the genteel sentimentality of patronesses like the Harriets Monroe and Moody who reigned in Chicago. Poets that congregated at Sommer's were thrown, sink or swim, into the main currents of American thought. However, the solid conviction of Sommer that art was ' timeless and international ' and the wide range of interests in the Cleveland group softened any narrowing sectional or nationalistic outlooks, and the democratic mentorship of the older man guarded against the crippling effects of a cult rampant.

Crane's childhood memories may have included his father's portiere-draped figure miming Mansfield's Henry IV. But in William Sommer he found a man who had made the ingrained American passion for rhetoric and oratory part of his daily expression. Passages of Goethe's Faust, Heine, Shakespeare flowed forth at the drop of a hat. The two would roar operas and symphonies at each other. Crane with a rather questionable vocal equipment, and the older man in a rich baritone. Crane soon rivalled the painter in expansive gestures, and uninhibited flights of self-expression. And his poetic talents ripened and flourished amid the shouts of laughter and approval that rang through the schoolhouse ; and the talk that eddied and cascaded like the falls of Brandywine.

In contrast to the Chicago groups, the Cleveland constellation seems to have been more workmanlike in some respects. The extravagant practical jokes of lightweights like Hecht and Bodenheim were absent, and the preponderance of producing artists encouraged a general fruitfulness. The backbiting and the choking spirit of financial competition which mars many twentieth century intellectual gatherings never really sifted across the sunny windows of Sommer's studio. Perhaps it was the living fellowship that Crane and Sommer felt for Walt Whitman that held guardianship over the group. For they stood young, rebellious and romantic in a quixotic solidarity against the materialism that whirled insistent siroccos about the Cleveland streets.

Willa Cather, Baudelaire, Ouspensky and Brancusi. The flow of ideas and impressions fell from intoxicating heights. Along with his own work, Charles would bring poems from his friends, James Daly, and the Pittsburgh dramatist, Haniel Long. Talk would turn to 'The Broom' under the incandescent leadership of Lola Ridge. Then Nelson and Sommer would begin on Nietzsche. The delegation from Akron, Jake and Helen and Bob Bordner, might hold forth on the latest from Mencken or Sinclair Lewis.

And of course it was out of this exuberant and turbulent flow of creative springs that Crane wrote his fine warm tribute to William Sommer in 'Sunday Morning Apples.'

It would not be accurate to identify Sommer with the venerable Alfred Stieglitz in New York, who was one of Crane's later idols. James Daly wrote to Charles (from Fuenterabbia, Spain, where he had gone to join James Stephens) '. . . wish I

had one-tenth of his nerve in "cultivating" the "important" people.' The awful light had broken by then, and it is possible that Crane's friendship for Stieglitz and his group at '291' was conditioned by elements of a newer sophistication. Then, too, Stieglitz approached the mastery of a Duveen at times in business acumen (fortunately for the fine painters he kept from literal starvation) while Sommer preserved a complete indifference to what he called 'the scramble for buttons' common to our age.

Sommer's days could be compared more fittingly in spirit to those of the old painter, John Butler Yeats. Sitting at Petitpas with the young companions of his day: Van Wyck Brooks, Alan Seeger, Robert Sneddon, and John and Dolly Sloan. Serene in the voluntary poverty which is the only enduring existence America offers to an artist in our century.

Of Bill Sommer's cherished young friends, the great sculptor, William Zorach, is still creating. But America's great poet, Hart Crane, destroyed himself in April, 1932—according to contemporary newspaper accounts—in the belief that 'there is no place in the world today for poetry.' And on a summer day in June, 1949, tenants of his cottage found the old painter, himself, dead. Some beer bottles and cans of beans still untouched, his long youth over.

And as the years pass beyond midcentury, a dry, almost invincible neglect chokes over the spirit of the young poet and the old painter alike. And their apples ripen and fall off; rotting untasted in the tall parched grass.

—Adelaide Simon

STILL

Seeking beyond quagmire
for unspoiled buds
    (naturally)

from your neon halo glow
side-glancing expectant
    but you know, don't you

where you left me

groping in gutters
with broken heels
hair like seaweed
all over my face
    smiling a cough
('member me, hon?)

why wrinkle your nose
brand me with silent recoil
single me out with squeamish finger
limp where you tossed me

now you're beyond, what will become
of your love-weak Rosa
    the frail petals given

but still in the image of Vesta.

—E. W. Northnagel

THE MAN OF HEAVEN

The man of heaven shall behold
incredible paradoxes in his time.
He shall see the firemist boiling without cauldrons
an unfortuitous concourse of atoms,
and a witch older than hell-fire
brewing the illegitimate planet-spawn
from mandrake roots of Sirius.

He shall see the incorrigible spermatozoa,
swarming in angry circles up to the aging moon.
He shall see the stone axe of reason
clenched in the hands of ape-men,
chipping away at the circle
until all space flows in
and the ape-man
shambles into Arcturus with angels in his eyes.

—Lilith Lorraine

MAN ON A NIGHT BEACH

The wing-pulled sand curves his step a wet mile,
all the others have gone to the festive cottages
whose lights spill faint gold on the beach.

Soggy toe touches the day's debris,
slush of paper bag, pulp orange peel,
and things even less respectable.

Ancient tug of his mind to the heavy wave,
there is more yes there, and more no in the right place,
exile slogging through now to a lone inheritance.

But an hour grinds down the rebellion,
cold skin asks the soft escape,
back to cocktail, and the dividing laughter.

—Alan Donovan

INDIAN GIRL PREPARING FOR CORN DANCE

Putting on
    a moccasin
the right one
    then the left one
motionless
    almost motionless
only the wiggle
    of her great toe
the right one
    then the left

Majestic
    tossing a braid
    back now
    over
    the bare shoulder
her eyes bright
    as the satin ribbons
Motionless
    again
    now
though her lips
    seemed surely
    to have moved

    Slightly.

—Cerise Farallon

SPARSE SEASON

Puckered in knowing
should I dissuade
with my sainthood number—
feather my wreath
like a desert wood comber

The season is when
against thistle-wood haunting
the bird-bobber hops
through its pilgrim wood hunting

The saint is so weary
his cowl is askew
my heart is no locket
a ribbon bleeds through.

—Cerise Farallon

WHO WILL MOURN MY PEOPLE?

My people have no armaments
To scatter upon the world
Death and destruction—
Yet have my people suffered so much destruction.
Millions and millions were tortured
And brutally severed from life,
Who will mourn my people?

Since all are eager to sate themselves with joy
And cannot pause to pity . . .
Seeking banquets with platters of praise
And drink to dim the murders and pillage.
The goal of self blots all from view—
But who—will mourn my people?

—Noah Steinberg

PRAYER TO THE COMING GENERATION

Our generation is bankrupt.
Our leaders have blocked the path to ideals
That they might line their pockets with gold.
What makes them mask themselves as human beings
When they crawl into every cranny and serve the God
    Of profit?
Their passion is the accumulation of many zeros
After a digit.
With golden prongs they consume their days and years
To enter the grave on the eve of the Sabbath.
Who will light the candle of truth
If no fire can consume their falsehoods?
May there arrive a generation
That will not eat honor with a golden spoon.
And when it plays, will not amuse itself
By the shuffling and dealing of emptiness.
But with love
Lift from the dust our holy alphabet
And light them with new illumination.

Amen!

—Noah Steinberg

MYOPIA

Myopic eyes see fraudulently,
nor recognize the shape of things
that lie beyond the realm of near.
The years have bred myopia
upon gigantic scale.
Horizons are a fuzzy blue
to the near-eye ess many;
those who see and speak
smother in an avalanche
of hooted jeers.

Stumbling on the rudiments
like awkward first-day scholars,
hugging the pudgy hand
of stolid precedent

they roam forth on myopic great-lands
judging merely light from dark—
gauging time by hunger.
Myopic eyes reveal a world
of fraudulent visions,
and open lids
upon no skeletons of truth.

—Dorothy Dalton

POEM BESIDE A RADIO

Hart Crane saw noise the pulse that stirred his age
and worked with it as Muse, its beating wings
cacaphonied behind his senses' urge
that plucked steel symphonies from rayon strings.

Walking, the horns were royal soliloquies
of blue despair—a television privacy—
love working out its minute agonies
while multitudes looked on—stage lunacy.

Behind his dreaming head, the gramophone
kept company his tangoed wish—the century
afraid of being alone the city's drone
through all incessant night drove out the empty

hour of himself—made him seem real—and all
the earth immediate and friendly. Still,
there were times of quietness, like a pall!
Returning sound, more frantic, lost its thrill:

And harsh drove him to black Sargasso depths—
the mothering sea's warm word in his lost ear.
Lord, grant us peace and time to pay our debts;
and strangle with a song the lone-hour's fear.

Why then, reefed in this island of a room,
with surf of music itching like a scab,
can I achieve no wholeness, sense of doom,
While the pale water-roar smash and grab?

A lavatorial flush—no warmth, no friend
to kiss off grief—the magic's out of reach—
drowned, perhaps, in the weeds that chalk his end.
Silence, be mine! I stretch, cut off the switch.

—Louis Johnson

NIGHT VIGIL

The twenty-third of love
held love fast
night in vigil
held in restless moon
wonder wishing

Mankind foremost
though knives
were hidden among
our garments

Heart white
we wept through
hunger

And at dawn
we killed
the land
had seen blood
before
we had seen
blood before

Though none
in lasting prayer
fasting
none had wished
to kill.

—Mason Jordan Mason

VISITATION DAY

The strain of waiting, the strain
of waiting, Baby, Baby,
why don't you come, Baby
why oh why don't you come

I'm nervous as a big rattle snake
and Baby you not here yet
I'm nervous right now Baby
as big coiled-up snake

Has you gone left me
behind these old rusty bars
has you gone left me Baby
behind these rusty bars

This old waiting is a strain
my guts all coiled up, Baby
like a poisonous, deadly snake
Baby, Baby, why aint you come

I break down these bars
break down this old jail
I'm coming to you, Baby
where you live at now

I break down these prison bars
I break down this old jail
but Baby Baby Baby
where you living at now.

—Mason Jordan Mason

ROOT SONG

Ping
to hold your love

No mahlstick
of a mahout

No mandingo
mumble mumble

But that little
bow-arrow

Ping
of a manikin man

Ebery fifteen minutes
at a quarter of one

Ukelele ukelele
where have I been
—Mason Jordan Mason

NAKED VISION

Under the breast tissue, the ribs encompassing shelter,
There is invasion.
Hark! In the wild fluttering devotion alterease,
Groan heart unashamed in the red valley of beating.
These pangs not of death but life.

A disturbance of these secret chambers,
The inrushing of spirit shakes this vessel loose.
The anaemic walls crumbling.

Then, shall these quiet pampas be accessible—
These bursting avenues burgeon forth
To sustain the evoking image.
The arteries flowing with experience,
Channel the whole nature,
In the cell's foundation, out of crimson flesh.

Here out of naked vision
The birth shall walk Incarnate.

—Irene G. Dayton

BED

Pillowed comfort wraps the body
Restful solace, someheat heady.
Author of deep unfathomed sleep
Submerging mind beyond all feeling.
Until the dawn is come to brush
Eyelids open and morn refresh.
Refuge for pain and burdened breast,
Invited place for lonely feast.
Companion, friend to traveller
Antidote, strength for reveller
Healer of sick, captor of time,
Utopia for idling.
Ever lover's hallowed Eden
Sanctified by virgin maiden.
The garner crib for many dreams,
An ivy tower, never leaning.
A place of birth-immortal soul,
Nativity of young-unfolding,
Sacred symbol, mighty omen.
—Irene G. Dayton

WHEAT

In this struggle, perpetual for all peoples,
The fallow ground is turned over and over until layers of soil
Yearn in sun or measured seed.

That enemies lie in wait for the 'heading out' of this plump kernel
Opulent with milk fluid
Is history sharecropping ground.

Here culture cradles arms around these wheat berries yielding sun to rain.
The Romans, Egyptians, and Chinese—
Waited for the ripening hour as we pretend not to wait,
The living kernel lost on the market page.

Rusts and fungus growths bide their time,
Harrowing field.
Worms fastidiously bargain their share,
And chinch bugs crawl upon the stems,
Until sun, rain, season, and harvest are caught together in undulation.

In the heart—
Where the corn of wheat dies to bring forth fruit,
We desire the fallow ground to be turned over and over
Until soil
Yearns again for fresh measured seed.

—Irene G. Dayton

FORSAKEN APRIL

The vanishing of winter took place in silence
except for a saw-toothed wind that hovered
in the holly.

Bittersweet berries, cadmium red and orange,
bounced like sparks in a wood-Neros fire.

My heart dilated with sorrow as I foresaw
spring scatter carelessly her daisies
across the sleeping fields of summer.

I knew that April, too, would be forsaken.

—Mary Godfrey Donleavy

OUR WEATHER OF LOVE

The strains of mist—
Dragging in the stains of mud—
Our weather of love!

The stagnations we have beheld—
The lanes traversed,
In murky dawn,
In dusk.

Bewildered
By the rolling smog,
The muck.

But even the chill
Is a comfort.

The flame of hell
At least
Has passed us
For a little while.

—Trumbull Drachler

MAN AND RACE

Erectile sprung,
No steel for our binding—
In gristle and bone thus bound.

Convolutions in dusk,
Gray matter, what matter?
Holding dark so close to our core.

And let us run
In darkness on the brightest day,
Secret seeking.

No secret holy—
No brightness left to hold—
Erectile springing.

—Trumbull Drachler

TYCOON IN THE HUMID WEEDS

My pipe, old boy, my slippers
And that quilted jacket there—
And let me rest.

I rode hard, the taxi fares almost doubled
And the streets infested.

The market took a nose-dive and I
Got out with only a few hundred thousand.
Though the war ought to help that,
Except for the goddamn restrictions
And the lying unions.

Let me rest.

My lawyer's chiseling on me and Honey Child—
That bitch! And the lobby slower
Than Christmas molasses.

Three fingers of gin, goddamnit Charles—
Three fingers of gin,
And let me rest.

—Trumbull Drachler

SNOW

The ceremonial snow has fallen twice today,
An unsought benison upon the poor.
It shrouds their awkward yards and alleyways,
The hoveled buildings that offend our gaze—
The city's rotting core.
Each crystal more beatifies.
Strange, they do not rush outside to raise
Their hands in the encircling storm
As Russian peasants in an ancient portrait.
Here hungry only huddle where it's warm.
Cherishing fire in barrels, broken stoves,
Babies and kittens cry against the wind
Knowing that spring is very far behind.

—Adelaide Simon

Ed. Note : This poem was attributed to the wrong author in the last issue.

In this issue—

Adelaide Simon, folk singer, is preparing a full-length study of Hart Crane, and has procured several Crane letters not available elsewhere, which will appear in an early issue of *Free Lance* . . . *E. W. Northnagel* hails from La Junta, Colorado, and debuts in this issue . . . *Lilith Lorraine* writes from Glen Oaks, Floral Park, Long Island . . . from Baltimore comes *Alan Donovan's* first submission . . . *Cerise Farallon* was raised in Louisiana, educated in New York, and worked as a medical social worker in Texas and now lives at Taos, New Mexico . . . the distinguished Yiddish poet, *Noah Steinberg,* kindly translated the poems appearing here for the first time . . . *Dorothy Dalton* has appeared in print before . . . *Louis Johnson* is a school teacher in New Zealand, and is editor of the new quarterly from down under, *Numbers,* and has appeared in a number of British and American publications . . . *Mason Jordan Mason* is one of America's promising primitives, now living in India, Mason has appeared in a number of magazines, and will soon appear in a German anthology of Negro verse . . . *Irene G. Dayton* lives in Rochester, N.Y., mother and housewife, and has appeared in a number of little magazines . . . *Mary Godfrey Donleavy* has had poems in *Free Lance* before . . . *Trumbull Drachler* calls El Paso, Texas, his home, and is called a Sinologist by some ; has had works in *Climax, Miscellaneous Man* and *Flame.*